

# Fire Risk Assessments

Your legal position. Do you know your responsibilities?

Dedicated to Fire Safety

In 2006, the regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) came into law. It swept away much of the old piecemeal fire safety legislation and gathered it up under the one legislative umbrella. Critically, it requires non-domestic premises to designate a RESPONSIBLE PERSON for that premises, whose is obliged in law to ensure that adequate and appropriate fire precautions are in place. You may be the RP (Responsible Person) whether you like it or not. It is your legal duty to carry out or cause to be carried out, by a "competent person", a Fire Risk Assessment for the premises, to comply with any recommendations identified within the risk assessment, and to review the risk assessment as appropriate (for example, if alterations are made to the premises), or as a minimum, once per year.

This is the document which controls and guides the fire safety arrangements at the site and you must be able to produce it if asked by a controlling authority—usually either the Fire Brigade or your local council. You may be asked for this document, and proof you have complied with it in good faith for several reasons including a routine audit, or a minor incident involving the Fire and Rescue Service

If you are the responsible person for the premises you are legally responsible for meeting the requirements of the RRO and will be the person required to be legally answerable if your fire safety arrangements, or lack of them, results in a fire incident.

Article 9 of the RRO states that: ...the responsible person must make suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to which relevant persons are exposed for purposes of identifying the general fire precautions he needs to take to comply with the requirements and prohibitions imposed on him by or under this order.



Christie's furniture shop fire, Commercial Rd, Penryn  
photo by permission of Victor Tullin

## What is a fire risk assessment and how do you go about getting one?

The premises fire risk assessment is a detailed study of the premises, the kind of business it carries out and the people who may be at risk of fire within the building. All of these come together to assess the risks of fire, control them and ensure the safety and in the worst case scenario, safe evacuation of the people who occupy the premises. It is the duty of the Responsible Person to carry out, or cause to be carried out, this assessment, and if there are more than five staff employed there, the risk assessment must be written down. It must be reviewed at least annually and also as necessary when changes occur within the premises that might affect the risk assessment. Whoever carries out the risk assessment, and it could be the responsible person, must be "reasonably competent" to do so, so the risk assessment must be an informed document, based on guidance provided by the Government, contained in 14 booklets, covering the different kinds of premises to be assessed.

## What does the risk assessment cover?

*The first step* is for the assessor to examine the building layout, and structure, and identify and record the fire risks that may be present. This includes any materials, or situations where fire is particularly likely to break out,

*The second step* is to look at the people who occupy the premises and identify if they are at risk, to what extent and why. This might include people who work out of main office hours, like cleaners, or anyone in an isolated location. You must also consider people with mobility problem. This includes not only the risk of fire, but their safe means of escape. These factors must be considered with reference to specific recommendations laid down in the RRO regarding distance from protected escape routes and exits.

*The third step* is to evaluate all the risks together and then identify and put into place systems and changes to control or eliminate the risks of a fire, and to people in a fire.

*The fourth step* is to record your findings which you are legally obliged to do if you have five or more employees. It is generally agreed, though not legally binding, that even if you have less than five, having a written assessment is good practice. You are legally obliged to carry out any recommendations or action steps identified in your assessment.

Your findings come together in another plan or document, called your Emergency Plan, which is the guidance and procedures you train your staff in, to deal with emergency situations. Adequately and appropriately training your staff in fire safety is part of your obligation under the RRO.

## Can you do it yourself?

The government encourages people to take ownership of their fire safety arrangements, by publishing 14 guidance documents, available free to download off the internet. You can use these to tackle the task yourself. The problem for most people is previous skills and understanding of fire and what constitutes a fire risk and a person at risk if a fire breaks out, and what measures are available and appropriate to control these.

The alternative is to use a third party to do the risk assessment for you. Fal Fire has staff trained and qualified to carry out fire risk assessments. You will get a comprehensive document, covering all the required elements and recommendations specific to your building and specifying any actions with a time scale. We will remind you within the 12 months, that it needs reviewing and carry out the review for you if you so wish.

For further information, call us on 01326 373896. We will come to your premises for a free first visit, to put you in the picture about what's involved and the likely costs. So there's nothing to stop you taking the first step towards getting your fire safety arrangements into place.